



Rattlesnakes

General Information

Rattlesnakes may be common in many of our parks. While they are an important member of our native fauna, they can also pose a safety hazard. However, the risks imposed by rattlesnakes can be greatly reduced by being aware of their presence and following a few simple guidelines.

Preventative Measures

Safety precautions when you are in rattlesnake habitat include:

- Wear rattlesnake guards or boots for added protection.
- Watch where you are reaching as bites to hands are very common.
- Be aware of your surroundings. Watch out for rattlesnakes under rocks and in shaded areas when it is hot, and in sunny areas when temperatures are cooler.
- Use a hiking stick, if possible, to probe brush you will be walking through.
- Never sit or climb or step over obstacles without first looking for hazards. Be particularly careful when turning over rocks or logs, or when moving through low brush.
- Be aware of foot placement when traveling down steep slopes and crossing over logs and rocks.
- Avoid using headphones or ear sets (e.g., listening to an iPod) while walking through rattlesnake habitat. This may prevent you from hearing a rattlesnake.

If You Encounter a Rattlesnake

First and foremost, do not attempt to capture, handle, or kill a rattlesnake. Most cases of snakebite are the result of attempts to capture or handle the snake, and rattlesnakes are protected in national parks.



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Rattlesnakes may respond to disturbance in several ways, such as:

- Remaining motionless to avoid detection.
- Moving away and seeking cover.
- Assuming a defensive posture with their body coiled in a striking position while emitting a buzzing sound from their rattles.
- If you back away from a rattlesnake that is in a defensive posture, the snake will almost always retreat and seek cover. Rattlesnakes are capable of striking an object about half their body length away or less, but will seldom strike unless provoked by a continued close-proximity threat. Many defensive strikes are dry bites with no venom injected. The venom is dangerous, but seldom results in death.

If Someone is Bitten by a Rattlesnake

In the rare event that you or a crew member is bitten by a rattlesnake:

- Wash the bite area with soap and water and dress the wound.
- Try to keep the affected area of the body as still as possible. Use a splint if possible or useful.
- Keep area of bite area lower than the heart.
- Mark the swelling so you can track rate of swelling.
- Seek immediate medical attention.
- Do NOT use ice to cool the bite, do NOT cut open the wound and try to suck out the venom, and do NOT use a tourniquet. Be aware that making an incision carries an inherent risk of complications.